

# THE VIRTUAL LAW SCHOOL

## UMAB law students, faculty and alumni surf the net to discover "Law On-line"

BY JONATHAN KALSTROM

**L**ast January, the School of Law launched a web site (URL: <http://www.law.umab.edu>) that now provides a variety of on-line information and services, many the first of their kind. Law students, alumni, professors and the general public can access the site and take advantage of the school's rapid virtual advances in cyberspace.

The web site includes such items as general information about the law school, course offerings, areas of study and admissions information. Prospective students can down-load application materials with a few easy key strokes. "The law school intends on making more information available via the web site," says Gary Grabowski, Director of Administrative Computing. "We see the School of Law's web site becoming one of the major mediums by which we make information available to the students and to the public."

The web site also includes the Thurgood Marshall Law Library Research Pages (URL: <http://www.law.umab.edu/marshall>)—an outgrowth of legal research on the Web courses that the research librarians teach. "I did not think there were sufficiently good indexing sites, or a way for law students to find those sites on the Web that were specifically related to them," says research librarian Mary Cornaby. "So we created web indexes that our students could use as a jumping-off point for conducting research on the Web." Those

indexes evolved into web pages that are now available to students, faculty, alumni and the legal community.

In addition to general legal research, pages were built for specific School of Law programs, including a Health Care Legal Research Page and an Environmental Resources Page. The web site also includes a Maryland Legal Research Page, designed to be a center for housing links to in-state research. "Our hope is that at least one law school in each state will establish a similar page, so that there is, in effect, a network of links to research for the fifty states," Cornaby says. The library's component on the web site also houses the Blue Sky Regulation and Research Page (URL: <http://www.law.umab.edu/marshall/bluesky>), which is designed for people interested in state securities law. It includes links to many of the state statutes, recent legislation and includes on-site, original pieces of research and scholarship. It is "the only page of its kind in the country," says Mark Sargent, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, and a Blue Sky law specialist, who, in conjunction with Cornaby, designed the page.

"We try to make each of our pages a focus for not just providing the best and the most up-to-date links to other people's sites...but also to promote original research that will help people do research on the Web better," Cornaby says. For example, Blue Sky includes a chart of all fifty state securities regulators and their web addresses. It's a "clickable table" so a user need only click the computer mouse to get to a particular site. In addition, the Maryland Legal Research Page contains an article by Mike Miller, the Director of the Maryland State

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Law Library, on legislative history research in the state, which does not appear anywhere else on the Internet. Some information appears on the library's web site before it appears in print or in an easily accessible web database, such as a copy of legislation passed by Congress last fall that affects state securities law practice. "We put the very first copy of the document up on the Web so that attorneys across the United States can find a copy of the new law easily," Cornaby explains.

In the future, Grabowski says the web site will contain alumni news and information. In the discussion stages as well are plans to make job information available to students on-line.

The law school has also become a leader in developing scholarly and professional list serves, which are electronic means of communication on the Internet among groups of people with common interests. These discussion groups allow a person to send and receive messages to and from large groups. Dean Sargent moderates two such list serves: one in federal securities law and another in state securities law. Professor Richard Booth moderates a list serve for teachers in the corporate and securities area. Users with questions on a new federal statute in the securities area can state the problem in the form of e-mail to all the people on the list, who then can respond almost immediately with their interpretations. "List serves thus provide an ongoing discussion or debate among experts in the field on an important current issue, which is available to the hundreds of people on the list," Dean Sargent explains.

Professor Alan Hornstein sets up a list serve in each of his classes for on-line discussions. "Depending on the class, sometimes I require participation, sometimes I simply encourage it," says Hornstein. Students can post questions to the list or comments about cases and issues that arose in class. Hornstein either responds, or lets the students discuss it among themselves. Since he started on-line discussions a year-and-a-half ago, a number of other faculty members have followed suit.

"I can't imagine at this point teaching a class without using it," Hornstein says. The on-line discussions often make the discussions in class richer, as the students have thought about the issues, and have conferred among themselves on the list serve, he notes. "Because they have to do it in writing on the list, it tends to sharpen their thought processes." Sometimes in formulating their questions, students discover they have already provided the answers on their own. Hornsteins' students also have his individual e-mail address so they can communicate with him privately. A number of students do contact him by e-mail, particularly evening students, because physical access is more difficult. "It's like having virtual office hours all the time," Hornstein says.

The School of Law is in the forefront of virtual reality and cyberspace. Law school candidates, students and faculty all have access to powerful resources through the new web site, which will only keep expanding over the coming years. Stay on-line for the latest developments.

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